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A CHOICE AND A CHALLENGE

A Clear Call to Presbyterians in the Day of a Great Advance

A FATEFUL CHOICE AND A FINAL CHALLENGE have come to all Canadian Presbyterians who have hitherto not been able to follow the leading of their Church on the question of Union. The time for debate is past; the decision of the Presbyterian Church has been irrevocably made. Whatever certain individual Presbyterians or congregational units may do, the decision of their Church cannot be changed; the Presbyterian Church in Canada will, on June 10th, 1925, enter into union with the Methodist and Congregational Churches, and the United Church of Canada will come into being.

TWO COURSES OF ACTION

MINISTERS AND CONGREGATIONS must now choose between two courses of action—loyalty to their Mother Church, or desertion on the threshold of her great adventure of faith. For the past thirty years the Presbyterian Church has followed what she believed to be the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and the Presbyterian member who votes to withdraw from his Church at this time lays upon his soul a great responsibility. To justify such desertion every non-concurring congregation will have to show fruits of the Spirit richer and greater than those of the Church of their fathers and the United Church which she is about to enter.

FOLLOW THE MOTHER CHURCH

WHAT INJUSTICE, what hardship or deprivation, what change is imposed upon a member or congregation going into the Union, that they should hesitate to follow their Mother Church as they have always done in the past in every great forward movement? The Basis of Union, confirmed by Dominion and Provincial legislation, guarantees to all congregations entering the United Church the right to call their own minister, to maintain the eldership unchanged, and in general to

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continue the organization, practices, forms of worship and ordinances enjoyed by them at the time of the Union. Presbyterians will enjoy the same personal liberty, the same privileges, the same ordinances, and will worship the same God and Father of all in the United Church of Canada as they and their forebears have done in the past. There will be no interference with or disturbance in the life of the congregation which goes into Union—and it is only by going with its parent Church into the Union that a congregation can maintain unbroken the continuity of its Church life. Moreover, the United Church has been assured of membership in the Pan-Presbyterian Council, and one of the Scottish General Assemblies has already sent congratulations joined with prayer for the richest blessing of God on the life and activities of the United Church of Canada.

WHAT IS THE ALTERNATIVE?

1. SEPARATION FROM THE MOTHER CHURCH. The Presbyterian Church in Canada as an organic unit goes into the United Church of Canada, carrying with it the vast majority of ministers, elders and people. It is a consideration to be carefully weighed by every member who is standing at the cross-roads at this time, that the most trusted leaders of our Presbyterian Church, who have guided in the great achievements of the past, have been active and zealous in the Union movement, and will go into the United Church. Of the sixteen living ex-Moderators of the General Assembly, all but one are for Union. Separation from hallowed associations with these fathers and brethren is surely a step that should not be taken unless some serious disability or cleaving difference of principle is involved.

2. SEPARATION FROM THE GREAT WEST. A non-concurring congregation will cut itself off from the religious life of the Western Provinces, where the churches are moving almost solidly into Union. Those Western congregations are the children of the East, and most of them are already in Union. It is no light matter for Eastern churches to even contemplate separating themselves from Christian fellowship with the pioneers of the great Western plains. Shall Eastern Canada be so much interested and concerned about the welfare of the wheat crop of the prairies and give no thought to the spiritual welfare of the

people who toil in remote isolation in order that we might have cargoes for our railways and ships, and a guarantee of material prosperity?

3. SEPARATION FROM FOREIGN MISSIONARIES AND THEIR WORK. The Foreign Mission Fields, Foreign Mission Work, and more than ninety-five per cent. of the foreign missionaries of the Presbyterian Church in Canada will go into the Union. Non-concurring congregations will not only separate themselves from these ambassadors of the Cross, for whose going they were in part responsible, but they will turn away from a great opportunity for wider missionary service and intercession.

4. VISIONLESS ISOLATION. Co-operation has been the unanimous policy of the Presbyterian Church in Canada for twenty years, and it has issued in the present Union. With whom will the proposed new body of Presbyterians co-operate in the Home and Foreign Mission fields? What future can there be for a congregation which elects to isolate itself from the larger life into which its Church enters, and which narrows its vision and interest to the task of preserving a denominational distinction?

5. UNREST AND DISTRACTION. Congregations which remain with their Church will be free to carry on their work in a normal and efficient way, but the congregation which refuses to follow its Church into the Union will enter upon a path beset with distractions and difficulties that will mar its life and work for years to come. To vote out of a great Church will be a disrupting process, but the troubles of a congregation will have only begun with a vote of non-concurrence. There will be more votes ahead involving the disposition of property and funds, and the future affiliations of such detached congregations—and these are matters that will not be settled easily or unanimously, and may result in further disruption.

6. PERPETUATION OF STRIFE. If a non-concurring congregation decides to enter a new Presbyterian Church, its interests and work will be for years largely centred upon the organization of the new body, and upon the preservation of the faltering fragments of Presbyterianism scattered over the Dominion. This will entail the raising of large funds

and waste of money on the perpetuation of the bitterness and strife engendered in the recent controversy. In the very nature of the case an organization based upon anti-unionism, non-concurrence and disputation can maintain its existence only by fostering the spirit of division and keeping alive old prejudices and contentions.

THE CHALLENGE

IN THIS NEW DAY, when men of all nations are earnestly seeking to minimize differences and draw together for united action in the common good, and are looking to the Church for leadership in the practical exhibition of unity and love, shall we devote time and energy and money to perpetuate division and strife, or shall we loyally follow our Church in her great new enterprise of Christian unity and brotherhood?

Three Canadian Churches, alike in spirit and service, are coming together in organic unity, the better to meet the religious needs of Canada, with its rapidly-growing population and incoming tide of immigrants. This is the challenge that comes to all. Loyalty to the Mother Church, loyalty to the religious and national needs of Canada, challenge every congregation to forget its differences and join wholeheartedly in this movement which marks a new era in the Church life of Protestant Christendom. In the face of so clear a call and so great an opportunity, how can any healthy and forward-looking congregation make the Great Refusal?

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Joint Committee on Church Union
1120 FEDERAL BUILDING : 85 RICHMOND ST. WEST
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